

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 022

SP 031 467

AUTHOR Zeldin, Shepherd; Bogart, Joanne
TITLE Perspectives on Parent Education: Implications from Research and an Evaluation of "New Partnerships for Student Achievement."
INSTITUTION Home and School Inst., Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Apr 89
NOTE 10p.
AVAILABLE FROM Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 1718 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Parent Education; Parent Responsibility; *Parent School Relationship; *Program Development; *Program Evaluation

ABSTRACT

The study reported in this paper examined issues in designing, implementing, and evaluating parent education programs, which are designed to promote home-school partnerships and to enhance the skills of caretakers in supporting their children's academic performance. The project included an evaluation of a set of parent education programs sponsored by the Home and School Institute (HSI), called New Partnerships for Student Achievement (NPSA). The study addressed three questions: (1) What do existing research and theory identify as the primary components of effective parent education programs? (2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the NPSA programs? and (3) What can be learned from the NPSA programs for the design, implementation, and evaluation of parent education programs? The study included a review of relevant research and theory, a reanalysis of HSI's data from the NPSA programs, and interviews with HSI staff and program coordinators. (JD)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED311022

PERSPECTIVES ON PARENT EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FROM RESEARCH AND AN EVALUATION OF "NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT"

Shepherd Zeldin

with the assistance of
Joanne Bogart

April 1989

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D.K. Rich

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

% Home and School Institute
Special Projects
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 462-3633

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 include a provision in the Chapter 1 authorization requiring school districts to implement parent participation programs, also referred to as parent education. In response to the interests of the Planning and Evaluation Service of the U.S. Department of Education, this study examined issues in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs of parent education, which are designed to promote home-school partnerships and to enhance the skills of caretakers in supporting their children's academic performance. Included in this study was an evaluation of a set of parent-education programs sponsored by the Home and School Institute (HSI), called New Partnerships for Student Achievement (NPSA). The study addressed three questions:

- o What do existing research and theory identify as the primary components of effective parent-education programs?
- o What are the strengths and weaknesses of the NPSA programs?
- o What can be learned from the NPSA programs for the design, implementation, and evaluation of parent-education programs under Chapter 1?

The study included a review of relevant research and theory, a reanalysis of HSI's data from the NPSA programs, and interviews with HSI staff and program coordinators. Personal interviews at four sites focused on how the NPSA model was implemented at different sites and the challenges in recruiting and serving low-income and ethnic populations.

Review of Literature

Research clearly demonstrates that parents influence children's school achievement, and that their influence can be positively enhanced through partnerships with the schools. For example:

- o School achievement is related to some aspects of parents' verbal communication and discipline practices.
- o Parent participation in the school (e.g., attending student conferences, volunteering in classes) is associated with high student achievement.
- o Family participation also has positive impacts on teachers and parents, helping both parties develop the skills and attitudes necessary to form an effective partnership.
- o Evaluations of parent education programs have shown improved child behavior in academic achievement and basic skills, as well as school-related behaviors such as study habits and social skills.

Several factors impede the realization of effective partnerships between schools and "at-risk" families, who include families with low income and ethnic minorities:

- o Because low-income and ethnic minority families historically have had few linkages with the schools, many of these parents lack key information and, by virtue of their isolation, are unlikely to approach the school on behalf of their children.
- o Poverty has important consequences that impede partnerships, including family stress and a lack of time to work with schools and be involved with children.
- o Conflict exists between the perceptions and expectations that some school personnel hold of low-income and ethnic minority families and the beliefs that some of these families hold of the school.
- While research shows that at-risk parents value education and are interested in their children's education, many administrators and teachers believe that this population lacks the interest or skills needed to participate.
- In response, many parents have been found to internalize negative beliefs about their group into their own self-image, to feel powerless to support their children's growth, and to view the school as an institution unwilling or unable to develop the strengths in their children.

Based on the literature, and using existing programs as illustrations, the review also identified common elements shared by successful parent education programs. It concluded that effective partnerships are formed with at-risk parents when these partnerships:

- o Have the commitment of school district administrators to redirect resources and modify some job responsibilities
- o Train teachers to work with economically and ethnically diverse populations
- o Support teachers' efforts to form home-school partnerships
- o Recognize the lifestyles of economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse parents and students
- o Design program components that build on the strengths of at-risk families, recognize the barriers facing them, and provide options for different types of involvement
- o Assess the needs and expectations of families to individualize program activities and promote ongoing participation
- o Use the home as a learning environment to maximize parents' control and confidence in working with their children
- o Design program activities that serve to empower parents and promote successful experiences
- o Provide active support to parents through ongoing direct contact with program staff and through parent meetings

Descriptive Analysis of the NPSA Projects

The overall goal of the NPSA programs is to promote student achievement by engaging families in structured experiences which enhance the skills and attitudes of both parents and children. There are five main actors in the NPSA service delivery system:

- o HSI designed the project model and program materials, and provides ongoing consultation and support to the service providers.
- o Five national organizations sponsor the projects in two sites each, for a total of 10 sites.

- o Local program coordinators recruit families and volunteer coaches, and have responsibility for implementation of the program.
- o Each family completes 10 family learning activities, over a 10-week period, which are done jointly by parents and children in their home.
- o The volunteers maintain contact with families to assist them throughout the program.

While each project shared the same goals and program model, variation existed among sites in recruitment strategies, participants' characteristics, and program operations. The tasks of creating community awareness and recruiting families and volunteers proved more demanding than expected. Overall, an estimated 579 families participated over a two-year period, with great diversity in family ethnicity, income, and educational level and in student achievement and age. In general, the projects recruited and served members or persons who had previously been involved with each sponsoring organization. The most significant difficulties were in recruiting low-income, Hispanic families. Finding that this population did not respond to the established recruitment methods, coordinators developed linkages with existing community institutions, such as schools and migrant centers, and relied heavily on personal contacts and word of mouth.

The method and frequency of volunteers' contact with families varied significantly among and within project sites. In some sites, volunteers called families weekly or biweekly; in others, they visited families in their homes; in two sites, volunteers met weekly at a central location and worked directly with both children and parents. Additionally, each site had between one and four family meetings that were open to all participants.

Overall, the site visitors were highly impressed with the commitment and efforts of the coordinators. None of them had prior experience in

implementing similar programs, and each responded positively to the challenges of operating a pilot program. Similarly, HSI staff received very positive assessments from the coordinators for their timely assistance and support.

One measure of program outcomes is the coordinators' judgment that most of the families completed most or all of the home learning activities. Similarly, on a post-program survey administered by HSI, a large majority of families reported benefits from their participation. The pattern of responses shows that parents were more likely to believe the program had an impact on them than on their children.

HSI staff administered pre- and post-test surveys to parents and children, but methodological and administrative problems prevent confident interpretation of this data. HSI has revised its evaluation procedures for the second year of implementation to include qualitative measures, and it appears that this approach will be more fruitful.

Implications for Parent Participation in Chapter 1

Under current Chapter 1 legislation, school personnel are given responsibility for reaching out to involve parents directly in their children's education. The NPSA programs, however, are based on the premise that schools do not have the resources to provide all the outreach and support that parent involvement requires. Another NPSA premise is that community service organizations are an untapped resource well-equipped to provide family education. The NPSA experience demonstrates that community organizations can effectively assist many parents, who might not otherwise receive guidance, in supporting their children's education.

In the majority of the NPSA projects that we visited, community organizations sometimes used school facilities as a setting for their programs. In four projects, schools assisted in family recruitment. One lesson from this evaluation is that partnerships between community organizations, schools, and parents are not automatically formed and thus require specific attention. In this regard, the NPSA projects indicate some valuable strategies for accomplishing these connections:

- o Chapter 1 educators could identify what organizations in their community are doing regarding parent education, and what such organizations are willing to do either in collaboration with schools or as an independent and complementary initiative.
- o Independent of the type of school-organization relationship that is formed, schools should actively support community organizations in their provision of parent education services. Similarly, community organizations should encourage their clients to take advantage of parent education opportunities offered as part of Chapter 1.
- o Since many community organizations have developed long-standing relations with parents, the organizations can be a valuable referral source for school-based parent education programs. Similarly, schools could refer parents to existing programs operated by community organizations.

In addition to demonstrating a program model for involving community organizations in parent education activities, the NPSA programs also employ some of the parent activities and procedures that are explicitly authorized in the Hawkins-Stafford Amendments. Thus, the NPSA can be used as illustrations to draw the following lessons:

- o Chapter 1 educators must consider the needs and lifestyles of the target population in order to develop appropriate program models for groups that differ on the variables of income, race, and ethnicity. NPSA's experience with low-income, Hispanic families illustrates the changes in recruitment strategies and participation expectations that were required in adapting a program model to this population.
- o Programs must also fit the needs and expectations of the particular families who participate, which planners can assess in

advance. The NPSA coordinators often amended the program design to accommodate individual families and the age of participating children. Their experience illustrates that Chapter 1 educators should be prepared to remain flexible to modify the program; it also suggests the value of assessing needs early in order to plan a suitable program.

- o The NPSA projects illustrate some effective strategies for strengthening the ability and motivation of parents to support their children's education, such as offering parents structured ways to work with children in the home, designing activities which build on the strengths of families and provide successful experiences, ensuring that outreach workers respect and support parents, and attempting to include all family members in the program.
- o A more difficult task will be to implement strategies that encourage parents and schools to form partnerships. This can arise from the opportunity to discuss home-school relations and to learn through positive, personal contacts with teachers--experiences that were not part of the NPSA model.
- o The NPSA experience illustrates the importance of training service providers to respect parents and to value their contributions to the academic performance of children. For Chapter 1 projects, the difficulties of working with ethnically diverse populations will also necessitate mechanisms for training and supervising teachers who work with families. In most schools, this will require some changes in the ways that schools invest their resources--for example, it will require investment in the labor-intensive task of aggressive outreach to parents.

Evaluating parent education programs, with their wide range of outcomes and the measurement and methodological difficulties associated with them, poses a final challenge. Careful selection of outcomes to measure seems especially warranted. The experience of HSI leads to the conclusion that evaluators and program planners should select outcomes which can reasonably be expected from the program. Although increased student achievement may be the ultimate goal, it is often unlikely that a program will directly attain this goal, and evaluators should also assess the short-term objectives (e.g., parent skills and behavior, development of home-school linkages) which are important prerequisites to student achievement. When possible,

...
evaluators should use quantitative instruments that have previously been validated, and control or comparison groups should be included in the design.

Findings from the NPSA evaluation indicate that program outcomes vary with the needs and interests of individual parents as well as the choices made during program implementation. Parent-program interactions, while difficult to capture through quantitative measures, can be examined through a rigorous qualitative approach. Qualitative approaches are also well suited for assessing variations in program implementation among sites. Thus, qualitative evaluations which examine variation in implementation among sites in relation to analyses of participants' perceptions could help Chapter 1 evaluators identify the program components responsible for observed changes.